

JAPANESE STUDENTS' CONTACT WITH ENGLISH OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM DURING STUDY ABROAD

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Abstract

This article reports a qualitative study about features of 29 Japanese students' contact with English outside the classroom during study abroad in an English-speaking country for 12 weeks. The major finding is that study abroad did not necessarily provide as many opportunities to use English outside the classroom as we had anticipated. Even if the students lived in a homestay, in many cases, interactions with the host family were very limited. The students had regular association with other Japanese peers in and outside school and frequently used Japanese in daily life. The present study argues that learners' initial target language (L2) proficiency, as well as native speakers' adjustment to learners' level of L2 proficiency, would be a crucial factor in determining the quality and quantity of contact with the L2 in natural settings outside the classroom.

Introduction

The aim of the present study is to investigate features of Japanese students' contact with English outside the classroom in a study abroad context, using qualitative data collected by interviews and diaries. One of the most popular beliefs among language learners (and even language teachers) is that living in a country where the target language (L2) is used in daily life brings about a greater number of hours in which learners are exposed to the L2 outside the classroom. In particular, a homestay is often considered an ideal environment to learn an L2 on the grounds that it can provide many opportunities to use the L2 in natural communicative settings. But does this really happen?

Since English has become a lingua franca in the modern world, every year an increasing number of students go to English-speaking countries, such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States (U.S.) to study English. Japanese students account for one of the largest proportions of international students at language

schools in English-speaking countries. In March 2006, 22.6% of students studying at private language schools in New Zealand were from Japan, and Japan ranked first in terms of the country of origin among the students, followed by Korea (16.9%) and China (15.9%) (Statistics New Zealand, 2006). Studying a language at language school abroad for a relatively short period of time (e.g. 3 - 6 months), called *gogaku-ryuugaku* in Japanese, has become a popular practice among the Japanese.

The majority of previous studies of L2 learning or L2 learners in a study abroad context have focused on either English speakers (typically American university students) or students participating in a formal study abroad or exchange programme organized by an educational institution (see extensive reviews by Churchill & DuFon, 2006; Coleman, 1997; Freed, 1995, 1998). There have been relatively few studies about Japanese students who arrange privately to study at language school abroad with homestay accommodation even though the majority of Japanese students in English-speaking countries are assumed to fall into this category. Thus, information about Japanese students' experiences outside the classroom during study abroad is valuable for language teachers and language school administrators in the host country as well as educators in Japan, who may send their students to study abroad.

Review of the Literature

Opportunities for Interaction in the L2 in a Study Abroad Context

Kaplan (1989) claimed that learners needed a certain level of initial L2 proficiency to benefit from a stay in an L2-speaking environment because most novice learners could participate only in very simple language activities, such as ordering meals and service encounters outside the classroom. In fact, Frank (1997; cited in Rivers, 1998) found that, for American university students studying and staying with local families in Russia, the quality of interaction with the Russian hosts was often restricted to routine short dialogue and television watching. The students spent a substantial percentage of their time alone engaged in homework, and both the students and hosts frequently expressed frustration at the students' inability to communicate in Russian. Similarly, an American university student in a study abroad programme in France commented that, "I probably spoke about maybe three sentences a day in French with my family, you know, 'I'm leaving. I'll be home later', or during dinner, 'Pass the so-and-so'. I never really spoke" (Wilkinson, 2000, p.39). Welsh (2001) showed that although most of the participants in his study (36 ESL students with mainly Asian ethnic backgrounds in

Auckland, New Zealand) evaluated their homestay experience positively overall, 58% of them reported having had less than one hour of interaction with homestay families during an average day. The only time when interaction took place was around meal times and the interaction was restricted to simple, everyday English about routines and daily activities. The students spent much time alone in their rooms. Spence-Brown (1993) also illustrated that because linguistic inadequacy was a major factor, behaviour of some Japanese high school exchange students, such as withdrawing to their own bedrooms quickly and refusing to participate in family activities, resulted in Australian hosts assessing the students negatively.

While many students in a study abroad context cannot establish an interactive relationship with native speakers of the L2 (e.g. host family), they usually have regular association with peers from the same country and frequently use their first language (L1). This limits the amount of L2 used in daily life. Wilkinson's (1998a, 1998b, 2000) qualitative studies revealed that, among American university students in a study abroad programme in France, English, not French, was often the primary means of communication outside the classroom. Their lack of initial French proficiency, unexpected communication problems in French, and difficulties in meeting native speakers of French other than their host families resulted in the students mingling with their American peers in the same town. Tanaka (1997) also found that Japanese ESL students in New Zealand had very little association with native speakers of English outside the classroom and often went out with their Japanese schoolmates. Freed, Segalowitz, and Dewey (2004) investigated the number of hours per week the L1 and the L2 were used in informal and natural settings outside the classroom among American university students in a semester study abroad programme in France, with a self-report questionnaire named Language Contact Profile (LCP) originally produced by Seliger (1977). They reported that the students spoke English more than twice as much as French outside the classroom.

Students' motivation to learn the L2 and Willingness to Communicate (WTC) in the L2 has a great impact on the amount of contact with the L2 outside the classroom. However, students' level of L2 proficiency affects the implementation of their WTC in the L2 in actual communicative situations. Isabelli-García (2006) conducted a qualitative study of four American university students' social networks, motivation to learn Spanish, and attitudes during studying abroad in Argentina. She found that the students with high motivation developed more extensive social networks with Argentines and had more opportunities for interaction in Spanish in daily life whereas the students with low motivation did not. However, the participants in Isabelli-García's

study already had a mid-intermediate or high-intermediate level of oral Spanish proficiency and supposedly could communicate with others in Spanish to some extent at the beginning of the study abroad. In comparison, even if novice L2 learners have strong WTC in the L2 and to expand their social networks with native L2 speakers, it is often very difficult to implement the WTC in natural settings outside the classroom due to a lack of L2 proficiency. Yashima, Zenuk-Nishide, and Shimizu (2004) carried out a questionnaire survey focusing on 60 Japanese high school students (16.1 years old on average) who participated in a year-long exchange programme in the U.S. They reported that the students' WTC in English before departure to the U.S. significantly correlated with their responses to two of five items regarding frequency of communication (i.e. "I reported what happened at school to my host family", "I volunteered answers or asked questions in class") and the average amount of time per day the students spent talking with the host family after the three-week initial programme. Their WTC in English before departure did not significantly correlate with their responses to the remaining three items regarding frequency of more challenging communicative activities (i.e. "I initiated a conversation with a host family member", "I asked teachers questions or talked to them outside the class period", "I talked with people I met at parties or meetings"). These results suggest that the implementation of the Japanese students' WTC in English was restricted to relatively simple communication in homestay and classroom situations. This would be affected by their limited English proficiency. Although Yashima et al. did not provide information about initial English proficiency of the Japanese students in the study abroad programme, many Japanese high school students do not have sufficient English proficiency to communicate with others in natural settings outside the classroom effectively. For instance, the mean score of the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) (paper-based, Institutional Testing Program) of 154 first-year Japanese high school students (15 or 16 years old) at a high school in Japan was 345.16 (Yashima et al., 2004). It was very low in the paper-based TOEFL score scale indicating between 310 and 677.

Homestay Environment

While some host families provide an excellent living and L2 learning environment for international students, treating them like a real member of the family and encouraging them to use the L2, others pay little attention to their homestay students and do not fit in with students' expectations. Accordingly, students' opinions about their homestay experience were divided. While some students had positive views and regarded interactions with host family members as the most useful L2 learning experience

during study abroad (e.g. Marriott, 1995; Schmidt-Rinehart & Knight, 2004; Tanaka, 1997), others were dissatisfied with the homestay environment (e.g. Crealock, Derwing, & Gibson, 1999; Wilkinson, 1998a, 1998b, 2000; Woodall & Takeuchi, 1999). One American university student who participated in a study abroad programme in France remarked that the homestay placement system was like “Russian roulette” (Wilkinson, 1998b, p.33).

There is often mismatch between students’ expectations and hosts’ attitude. In their studies of American university students in study abroad programmes in Russia and France, Miller and Ginsberg (1995) and Wilkinson (1998a, 1998b, 2002) found that the students tended to expect native speakers outside the classroom to be participants in their language learning experiments or even to play the same role as language teachers in the classroom, taking the initiative in conversation and correcting students’ linguistic errors. Students’ evaluations of host families were often based on these criteria. Their studies showed that when their hosts adopted the language-teacher-like role, the students felt comfortable communicating with their hosts in the L2 and made positive remarks on their homestay experience. In contrast, when their hosts did not take the initiative, the students retreated from communicative opportunities and formed negative views on their host families. The hosts’ initiative (e.g. giving corrective feedback, developing conversation, adjusting to students’ level of L2 proficiency) is a critical factor in determining the quality and quantity of the interaction between the host and the student, especially if the student’s level of L2 proficiency is not high. Iwami (2001) showed that two Japanese high school students who experienced a homestay in the U.K. were successful in comprehending what their hosts said, subject to the hosts’ adjustment to the students’ English proficiency, using strategies such as repetition and syntactic and lexical simplification. Churchill and DuFon (2006), Knight and Schmidt-Rinehart (2002), and McMeekin (2006) indicated that the host mothers in Japan, Mexico, and Spain “viewed themselves as surrogate mothers [for their homestay students and actively played] the roles of conversation partner and teacher” (Churchill & DuFon, 2006, p.24). However, hosts do not always take such positive attitudes. Tanaka (2004) pointed out that because the number of international students and demand for homestay accommodation had increased significantly in recent years, especially in English-speaking countries, providing homestay accommodation had become a more commercial endeavour. Some hosts were mainly interested in earning extra income and treated the homestay students as a boarder or a flatmate, rather than a member of the family.

The homestay environment also appears to play an important role in students’ views on study abroad in general and even the host community, host country, and host

culture. For example, due to disappointment with their homestay environment, some American students who participated in a study abroad programme in France avoided active interaction with their French hosts and intensified their association with American peers outside the classroom (Wilkinson, 1998b, 2000). Crealock et al. (1999) also reported that, for some Japanese high school students in Canada, problems with their host family placements were a main cause of delays in successful immersion in the host culture and host society. In addition, the homestay experience can demotivate L2 learning. For instance, Wilkinson's (1998a) case study provided an example of how one American student in France was treated like a real member of family, intending to change her major at her home university in the U.S. from biology to French and to return to France for an academic year of study. In contrast, the other student who stayed in an unpleasant homestay environment decided to shorten her stay in France from eight weeks to four and considered dropping her French minor.

Method

Participants

The participants in this study were 29 Japanese students (9 males and 20 females) taking general English courses at two private English language schools (Schools A and B) in Auckland, New Zealand, for 12 weeks. Their average age was 23.7. Nineteen students had completed a tertiary education in Japan (13 university graduates, three two-year college graduates, three vocational college graduates) while six students had taken long-term leave from their university to study abroad. The other four students had not had any tertiary education after they graduated from high school in Japan. All the students had studied English at junior and senior high school for at least six years in Japan. Many of the students had been overseas for a short period of time on holidays before they came to New Zealand although they had not been overseas for more than 12 weeks. While 17 students stayed with a local family for 12 weeks, seven students lived in a dormitory for the same period of time and never experienced a homestay. The remaining five students experienced both homestay and non-homestay (e.g. living in a dormitory, an apartment, a flat shared) environments. Twenty-six students studied at School A while only three did at School B. The detailed background of the participants is presented in the Appendix.

All the students took the Oxford Placement Test (OPT) (Allan, 1992) at the beginning of the English courses. According to the mean total score (122.72 out of 200, $SD = 16.21$), their initial English proficiency level could be described as post elementary (Allan, 1992). The mean score was also equivalent to the International English Language

Testing System (IELTS) 4.0, paper-based TOEFL 450, and computer-based TOEFL 133 (Allan, 1992; Westminster Institute of Education, n.d.a, n.d.b). Several experienced ESL teachers commented that the students' initial level of English proficiency was average as Japanese students enrolled in general English courses at language school.

Data Collection

The present study utilized qualitative data collected through two instruments: the interview and the diary. Open-ended and semi-structured interviews were conducted with all of the 29 Japanese students individually, immediately after they had studied in New Zealand for 12 weeks. The interviews were carried out in Japanese, following a prepared interview schedule. In the interview, the students were asked to describe where and under what circumstances they had contact with English outside the classroom and to state their opinions about these experiences in terms of the effects of English learning. All interviews were tape-recorded and then transcribed for analysis.

The diary was optional. The author asked 15 of the 29 students, randomly selected, to write a diary in Japanese for 12 weeks. At the beginning, the participants in this task were given an exercise book and a set of guidelines (written in Japanese) about what they were expected to write. The guidelines were constructed by referring to previous diary studies (e.g. Bailey, 1990; Numrich, 1996). They were assured that the material in their diaries would be treated with full confidentiality. Each diary was collected once a week, photocopied, and then returned to the students immediately. Eventually, because of the time-consuming nature of the task, only five students kept a diary about their English learning experiences in New Zealand. These diaries included a variety of comments on language classes, teachers and classmates, out-of-class learning activities, language use, their feelings, etc. On average, a 12-week diary contained about 18,000 Japanese characters and was 24 pages long.

Normally, two or three new Japanese students enrolled in the general English courses of Schools A and B every Monday. The author approached them on their first day at the school and recruited new participants every week. The following procedures were repeated until a substantial volume of data had been collected.

1. If the students agreed to participate in this research project, they completed a questionnaire asking about their background information such as sex, age, educational background, previous overseas experience, etc.

2. They took the OPT within one week after they arrived in New Zealand.
3. If they agreed to keep a diary, they submitted their exercise book once a week
4. Each student was interviewed individually at the end of his/her 12-week study.

Data Analysis

Following Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Merriam (1998), the qualitative data collected through the interviews (29 students) and the diaries (5 students) were analyzed as follows: identifying significant units of data (i.e. the students' comments reflecting contact with English outside the classroom in New Zealand), grouping the units of data into categories that have something in common, considering how to link the categories together in some meaningful way, and developing a theory to explain a large number of phenomena and how they are related.

Freed (1990) has claimed that types of learners' informal contact with the L2 in natural settings outside the classroom (out-of-class L2 contact) can be divided into two broad categories: interactive contact and non-interactive contact. Interactive contact involves direct social contact with native speakers, such as host family members and foreign friends, whereas non-interactive contact is media-related, such as listening to the radio, watching television, and reading books and newspapers. This study considered the two types of out-of-class L2 contact.

The interview transcripts and the diary entries were originally written in Japanese. In this article, all students' quotes from these sources were translated into English by the author.

Findings

Interactive Contact

A number of students acknowledged that they had had more contact with English in New Zealand than in Japan, but less than they had anticipated. Regarding interactive contact, some of them were surprised that there were far fewer opportunities to speak English in daily life in New Zealand than expected. They reported limited interactions with native speakers outside the classroom. Language schools were made up of international students (i.e. non-native speakers), and only two out of 29 students in this study were successful in making New Zealand friends outside school other than their host family. Some students expressed their frustration with this situation.

For most of the students, a homestay provided almost the only opportunity to have regular interaction with native speakers outside the classroom. The students' opinions about their homestay experience were divided. While some thought that a homestay environment was beneficial to L2 learning, others did not. In the interview, a total of 18 students specifically mentioned their homestay experience. Six (33%) had positive views, nine (50%) negative, and three (17%) neutral. The views depended on the host family.

Some hosts, whom the students evaluated positively, talked to the homestay students actively, helped improve their English by teaching them new words or correcting their grammatical errors, and sometimes took them out shopping or to the cinema. In other words, a good homestay provided a number of opportunities to use and learn English. Moreover, it seems that the homestay had an effect on not only opportunities to use English, but also on students' affective conditions, particularly their motivation to learn English. Some students commented that because their hosts were very friendly and supportive, their desire to communicate with their hosts and to learn English increased. For example, after leaving her first homestay due to an unpleasant living environment, one student (NZ19) formed a good relationship with the host mother in the second homestay, who was an ESL teacher and lived alone. She wrote in her diary:

My host mother loves reading books. She often goes to a public library nearby. So I went there with her this week again and borrowed two books for non-native speakers. These are the same type of books I always borrowed from the school library. After coming home, we read the books until dinnertime. (Week 5)

I watched a TV programme about home decoration with my host mother and we were making comments, such as "The colour of the wall is nice, isn't it?" and "The curtain is lacking something, isn't it?" When she asked, "Is there a similar TV programme in Japan?", I just answered, "No." But I really wanted to continue to say, "This is the first time I've seen this type of TV programme in New Zealand. I find it quite interesting." However, I couldn't do that because I couldn't make such sentences in English at that moment. I want to be able to make comments while watching TV. I have to study much harder. (Week 11)

These comments indicate that NZ19 was encouraged to read and speak English by her host mother. In addition, speaking with the host mother provided the student with

an opportunity to monitor and evaluate her progress in English. These experiences made her realise that her English proficiency was not sufficient to communicate with her host mother effectively, and she became more motivated to learn English.

In other cases, the homestay experience sometimes had a negative impact on some students' L2 learning. For example, NZ13 remarked that because her previous host mother had a very strong accent, she often could not understand her host mother's English. When she could not comprehend or when she asked her host mother to repeat, her host mother was not cooperative and even looked displeased. As a result of this negative experience, she became more anxious about using English and for a short while, avoided having contact with English speakers.

Overall, a homestay did not provide as many opportunities to speak English as the students had expected. The problem stemmed from both the students and their hosts. Quite a few students admitted that they did not speak to their hosts actively although they understood that they should. There were two main reasons identified for such passivity.

First, the students did not have sufficient English proficiency to communicate with others in English. For example, NZ23 moved to a homestay in Week 5 because in the dormitory there were a number of Japanese residents and she often spoke Japanese in daily life. She wrote in her diary that her host mother was kind and actively talked to her. However, she could not understand what her host mother said and could not express her own wants in most cases during the entire period of the homestay. She was very frustrated. Accordingly, in the interview, she remarked that the homestay experience did not have any positive effects on the improvement of her English proficiency. Similarly, NZ20 moved to a homestay from the dormitory in Week 11. Her first impression of her host family was positive. She wrote in her diary that they appeared to be kind, yet because of her limited English proficiency, she did not interact. She wrote:

Today I moved to a homestay. [...] Two international students other than myself are staying with the same family. I can understand what the students and my host mother are talking about a little bit. But I can't understand enough. So I can't take part in the conversation. (Week 11)

My host mother is trying to talk to me as much as possible all day. But I can respond only using simple words like "Yes" and "10 minutes." I feel sorry for her because I can't develop the conversation. (Week 12)

Second, the students were shy and modest and they thought that they should not disturb the daily life of their host family. In the interview, NZ17 pointed out that the homestay did not necessarily create the acquisition rich environment that she expected:

Actually, there are very few opportunities to communicate with native speakers. [...] For example, a homestay sounds very nice. People believed that I would live with native speakers and share life with them. But, in reality, it was nothing like that. I came home, and I had dinner with them at the usual time. My host family members watched television after dinner. I didn't like to disturb them. So I didn't talk to them. I kept quiet and looked the other way. That was all. I found that it was more difficult to make an environment where I could talk to native speakers than I had thought. Even though I live in a homestay, it's difficult. You usually don't talk to other people a lot unless there is a common interest or topic, do you?

Some students mentioned in the interviews that their hosts did not pay much attention to them. They remarked that they had seen their hosts only at breakfast and dinner times because their hosts worked full time during the week and often went out at nights or on the weekends by themselves.

In many cases, the students merely exchanged simple greetings and held short conversations with their hosts at breakfast and dinner times. In most of their spare time, the students stayed and studied in their rooms or went out alone or with their Japanese friends. Most of the students had regular association with their Japanese schoolmates and frequently used Japanese outside the classroom. For the students who lived in the dormitory, the Japanese connection tended to be more intensified than the students who lived in a homestay because quite a few Japanese students lived there. Consequently, some of the dormitory students reflected that, in terms of language use, their daily life in New Zealand was almost the same as in Japan.

Even though many Japanese students had little interaction with native English speakers outside the classroom, wherever they lived (in a homestay or a dormitory), there were opportunities to speak English with non-native speakers such as non-Japanese classmates. Although they could not always communicate in English successfully, some students tried to make the most of the opportunities while others did not. For example, NZ26 who stayed in a dormitory for 12 weeks often went out with her non-Japanese classmates. She wrote in her diary, "Today I ate dinner with my Chinese friends. I'm always impressed that we can communicate with each other quite well in our shaky English. Today we made

conversation in our simple English again and enjoyed the dinner” (Week 6). Because their English proficiency was on a similar level, it was for them much easier to establish regular interactive relationship with non-native English speakers than native English speakers. On the other hand, NZ20, who stayed in a dormitory for the first 10 weeks, wrote in her diary that, “I went out for lunch and shopping with my Japanese friends. I always think that speaking with Japanese friends in Japanese is no good for learning English. But unconsciously I always speak with the Japanese...” (Week 8). In the interview, NZ5 reinforced this point. She admitted that she did not use English much outside the classroom because she regularly associated with other Japanese students and she did not talk to her host family actively even though she had stayed with the same family for 12 weeks. She realised that living in an English-speaking country did not automatically provide many opportunities to use English.

Non-Interactive Contact

While only a few students voluntarily read books and newspapers in English outside school, many students regularly listened to the radio and watched television in English in their free time. However, their evaluation of the effects of these activities on the development in their English proficiency was divided. For example, NZ15 was positive. He commented in the interview that he was satisfied with the progress in his listening ability and that one of the main reasons for his progress was watching the TV news every day and trying to understand the content. His diary illustrated that although he could not understand what was said, he continued to watch TV programmes and movies.

In contrast, NZ20 was sceptical. Her diary showed that she began to watch television in the common room in the dormitory from Week 1. She also bought a radio-cassette-CD player in Week 5 and listened to radio programmes and CDs in her room. However, although time passed, she could not comprehend the TV and radio programmes in most cases. She often wrote in her diary that she was not sure whether it made sense to watch television or listen to the radio when she could not understand anything. NZ3 also had doubts about to what extent average Japanese students (including himself) could actually comprehend the content of radio and TV programmes in English and about the effects of listening to the radio and watching television on English proficiency. He acknowledged that he could not understand the radio and TV programmes well although he had been listening to them and watching them for 12 weeks. In the interview, he remarked:

If I listen to the content I can't understand at all and even if I try to do so over and over, I will not be able to understand it for ever (laugh). [...] I think that no matter how many times you listen [to English you don't know], you will not come to understand it. [...] I'm pretty sure it will never happen that you become able to understand the English suddenly if you just keep listening or watching.

These comments suggest that the radio and TV programmes (like interaction with the host family), often considered one of the best materials to learn an L2, did not necessarily provide comprehensible L2 input for the Japanese students.

Discussion and Conclusion

The present study found that Japanese students' contact with English during study abroad appears to be more limited than expected. Even if they lived in a homestay, the quality and quantity of interactive contact with English outside the classroom was very restricted. Non-interactive contact with English (e.g. watching TV) also did not provide comprehensible L2 input in many cases. Previous studies (e.g. Miller & Ginsberg, 1995; Wilkinson, 1998a, 1998b, 2002) showed that much less out-of-class L2 contact than expected was common for not only Japanese ESL students but also other international students in different study abroad settings (e.g. American university students in France). In her extensive review of studies about L2 learners and L2 learning in a variety of study abroad settings, Freed (1998, p.50-51) has concluded that there is a significant gap between students' general beliefs and the realities of the study abroad environment:

[The] popular notion of the study abroad environment is not as uniform as was once believed... [Students'] interactions with native speakers may be far less intense and frequent than was once assumed and... the so-called "immersion" into the native speaker linguistic environment may be somewhat less guaranteed than was once taken for granted.

The main reason for the students' limited contact with the L2 outside the classroom during study abroad seems to be their limited L2 proficiency. Even if they had wanted to do so, it would have been very difficult for them to communicate in the L2 with native speakers (e.g. host family) and to understand the L2 media. As Kaplan (1989) and Rivers (1998) have suggested, it appears that the more advanced the students' initial L2 proficiency is, the more likely they are to make the most of their

opportunities to use the L2 outside the classroom while studying abroad. If the students do not have sufficient L2 proficiency, interaction with their hosts and other native speakers in the L2 will be very limited, association with peers from the same home country will be intensified, and the amount of L1 use outside the classroom will increase. Thus, if students want to immerse themselves in the L2-speaking environment and to enrich their study abroad (e.g. communicating with the host family well, making friends with local people) as they expect, they should try to improve their L2 proficiency as much as possible in their home country before going abroad.

Yet this is not to deny the value of studying abroad for novice L2 learners. Even if the learners have less interaction with native L2 speakers than they anticipated, their study abroad experience may contribute to non-linguistic outcomes, such as personal development and increased socio-cultural awareness (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1992, 1993; Marriott & Enomoto, 1995). These outcomes are as beneficial and important as achieving higher L2 proficiency. Furthermore, the present and previous studies have found that study abroad tends to strengthen Japanese students' confidence and motivation to learn and use English. For example, Tanaka and Ellis (2003) reported that after a 15-week study abroad programme in the U.S., Japanese university students became less nervous when speaking English, more tolerant in making mistakes when speaking English, and more satisfied with their progress in English. In particular, as Tanaka (2004) has mentioned, Japanese students' experience of communicating with native speakers in natural settings outside the classroom (e.g. homestay and shopping situations) often triggers positive changes in their confidence and motivation even if the communication is very simple and not necessarily successful. This may have a positive effect on their learning behaviours and on their L2 proficiency in the long term. For novice learners, the impact of natural exposure to the L2 outside the classroom on L2 learning will more likely be indirect (e.g. changing learners' affective states on learning and using the L2) than direct (e.g. increasing the amount of appropriate input and output in the L2), especially in a short period of time, such as studying abroad for 12 weeks.

The host family members are mostly the only native speakers with whom the international students in a study abroad context had regular contact outside the classroom. Therefore, the homestay environment has a significant impact on students' overall impression of their study abroad and the host country. In addition, the hosts' initiative, especially their adjustment to students' level of L2 proficiency, plays a vital role in determining the quality and quantity of the interaction between the host and the student. However, there is no guarantee that all the hosts take such initiative. The

quality of homestay (i.e. the hosts' attitude toward the homestay students) varies considerably. Some hosts seem to treat the students as a boarder or a flatmate rather than a member of the family and to pay little attention to the students. For this reason, language school administrators should select and monitor host families carefully and provide guidelines about how to interact with their students. In order for language schools to satisfy the students and keep a good reputation, the quality control of host families is as important as that of the language programmes and teachers.

Study abroad has become popular among the Japanese, and nowadays there are usually many Japanese students in language schools, particularly in big cities in English-speaking countries. The two language schools in this study were not exceptions. Consequently, although the Japanese students at language school understood that they should try to speak English, communication problems in English discouraged them from doing so and intensified association with other Japanese students in and outside school, with whom they spoke Japanese. Some Japanese students originally intended to stay away from the Japanese circles. However, it appeared to be difficult to resist the temptation to be in a cosy Japanese environment and to avoid speaking Japanese totally. The association with Japanese peers has some positive effects on students' affective conditions, such as reducing their stress in a foreign country and getting moral support (Tanaka, 1997). But excessive association obviously increases the amount of Japanese used and decreases opportunities to use English outside the classroom.

The students' personality (e.g. activeness, shyness) will influence the amount of interactive contact with the L2. For example, although some students live in a homestay, they will not speak with the hosts actively even though the hosts adjust their speech to the students' level of L2 proficiency and try to develop a conversation. Other students (like NZ26 mentioned above) who live in a dormitory will try to converse with other international students in the L2 actively despite their limited L2 proficiency. In addition, students in study abroad settings do not always have strong activeness and motivation to learn and use the L2. Many students, especially those aiming to study a language at language school for a relatively short period of time (i.e. the so-called *gogaku-ryuugaku* in Japanese), are actually more keen on holidays abroad than on studying. This kind of student is more likely to fall into an easy life-style, mingling with peers from the same country and using their L1 in daily life outside the classroom. Indeed, there are a greater number of opportunities to use the L2 outside the classroom in a study abroad context than in the students' home country; however, it is up to the students whether they utilise the opportunities.

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Appendix

Background of the Participants

	Sex	Age	Diary	School	Education	Accommodation
NZ1	F	20		A	L	HS
NZ2	F	23		A	UG	HS
NZ3	M	28		A	UG	D
NZ4	M	29		A	UG	D
NZ5	F	25		A	UG	HS
NZ6	F	24		B	2CG	HS (4 wks), F (8 wks)
NZ7	F	20		A	L	HS
NZ8	F	19		A	2CG	HS
NZ9	M	21		A	L	HS
NZ10	M	22		A	UG	D
NZ11	F	38		A	UG	HS
NZ12	F	21		A	HG	D
NZ13	F	19		B	HG	HS (8 wks), F (4 wks)
NZ14	M	21		A	HG	HS
NZ15	M	22	O	A	L	HS
NZ16	F	20		A	2CG	HS
NZ17	F	26		A	UG	HS
NZ18	M	27		A	UG	HS
NZ19	F	25	O	A	VCG	HS1 (2 wks), D (1 wk), HS2 (9 wks)
NZ20	F	20	O	A	UG	D (10 wks), HS (2 wks)
NZ21	F	22		A	UG	HS
NZ22	M	24		A	HG	HS
NZ23	F	26		B	UG	HS
NZ24	M	21		A	L	HS
NZ25	F	29	O	A	VCG	D (4 wks), HS (8 wks)
NZ26	F	23	O	A	UG	D
NZ27	F	26		A	VCG	HS
NZ28	F	25		A	UG	D
NZ29	F	22		A	L	D

Education: UG (university graduate), L (on leave from university), 2CG (2-year college graduate), VCG (vocational college graduate), HG (high school graduate)

Accommodation: HS (homestay), D (dormitory), F (flat share), wk (week)